



National Transportation Safety Board

The Chairman's Corner

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Friday, May 11, 2007

Board Meets To Discuss Aviation and Pipeline Accidents

The National Transportation Safety Board met on Tuesday, May 1 to discuss two accidents. The department of Aviation Safety presented the first item on the agenda, a small airplane crash in Manhattan, NY that occurred in October 2006. The second item on the agenda was a natural gas explosion and fire in Bergenfield, NJ, on December 13, 2005.

On October 11, 2006, a Cirrus Design SR-20, N929CD, operated as a personal flight, crashed into an apartment building in Manhattan, New York City, while attempting a 180-degree turn maneuver above the East River. The two pilots on board the airplane were killed, including the owner of the aircraft, Cory Lidle of the New York Yankees. The second occupant was a commercial pilot with a flight instructor certificate. Three people on the ground were injured, and the airplane was destroyed.

The Board determined that the probable cause of a small airplane crash in Manhattan last October was the pilots' inadequate planning, judgment, and airmanship in the performance of a 180-degree turn maneuver inside of a limited turning space.

In the meeting's second item, the Board determined that the probable cause of a natural gas explosion and fire in Bergenfield, NJ, on December 13, 2005, was the failure of a service company to adequately protect a natural gas line while excavating a fuel storage tank. During the excavation, shifting soil resulted in damage to the service line and the migration of natural gas into a nearby apartment building.

Contributing to the accident, the Board said, was the gas company's failure to conduct effective oversight of the excavation and to be prepared to promptly shut off the flow of gas after the service line was damaged.

Additionally, the Board found that the Bergenfield Fire Department's failure to evacuate the building, despite the strong evidence of a gas leak, contributed to the casualties in the accident.

Investigators found a break in the 1 1/4-inch service line at an underground connection downstream from where excavators were removing a 5,000-gallon fuel oil tank that was buried under an asphalt parking lot adjacent to the apartment building. Workers told investigators that the ground surrounding and supporting the pipeline had collapsed. Three residents of the building were killed; four other residents and a service company worker were injured. The building was estimated to be a total loss.

NTSB Testifies On Capitol Hill

On May 1, 2007, Chairman Rosenker testified before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security, regarding Electronic On-Board Recorders for Hours-of-Service Compliance.

Chairman Rosenker spoke about how this technology can help prevent fatigue-related accidents by improving commercial driver compliance with the hours-of-service regulations.

"Fatigue-related accidents continue to plague our nations highways and because fatigue is difficult to quantify by investigating agencies, it is likely the most underreported underlying causal factor in highway accident investigation. Electronic On-Board Recorders hold the potential to efficiently provide the proper incentives for compliance with hours-of-service rules and ultimately make our highways safer for all drivers," Chairman Rosenker stated.

On May 8, 2007, Chairman Rosenker testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials Rail Safety Legislation.

Chairman Rosenker spoke about the Safety Board's concern of several rail safety issues, including train crew fatigue; the lack of positive train control systems to prevent train collisions, overspeed derailments, and improper switch positions in non-signalized (dark) territory.

During his testimony, he emphasized that technological solutions, such as positive train control systems, have great potential to reduce the number of serious train accidents by providing safety redundant systems to protect against human performance failures.

"We are pleased to note that today, several railroads are moving to develop positive train control systems," said Rosenker. "Although we are encouraged with progress underway by some railroads, we note that positive train control systems are needed on railroad systems across the entire United States. The Safety Board believes that positive train control systems should be required."

As a consequence, positive train control has been on the Safety Board's list of Most Wanted transportation safety improvements for 17 years.

Member Hersman Addresses Kentucky Lifesavers 2007 Highway Safety Conference

Member Hersman opened the Kentucky Lifesavers 2007 Highway Safety Conference in Louisville on April 23 by describing a series of investigations to illustrate the Board's activities and some of its key recommendations. Following her remarks, she attended breakout sessions on successful booster seat programs, ATV safety, and prosecuting DUI cases in Kentucky. Prior to the conference opening, she met with the Louisville Courier Journal editorial board to discuss highway and aviation safety. Steve Blackstone, who also assisted in preparing her presentation, accompanied her to these events in Louisville.

Chairman Rosenker Meets With Representatives Of Meharry Medical College

On May 8th Chairman Rosenker met with Dr. Wayne Riley, the new President of Meharry Medical College, and Irwin Goldzweig, Director of Meharry-State Farm Alliance, to discuss efforts to increase safety belt and child booster seat use by minorities. They also discussed the need for accident prevention technology in vehicles. Meharry and the Board will continue their cooperation in the States on primary enforcement safety belt and child booster seat laws. Elaine Weinstein and Kevin Quinlan (SRA), Terry Williams (PA), Dale Dirks, President of the Health and Medicine Counsel of Washington, and Lodriquez Murray of Meharry Medical College attended the meeting. Nashville-based Meharry Medical College is the nation's largest private, independent historically black institution dedicated solely to educating minority and other health professionals.



L to R: Dr. Riley, Chairman Rosenker, and Irwin Goldzweig

Chairman Rosenker Delivers Keynote Address at ISASI Management Meeting

In an address to the International Society of Air Safety Investigators, Chairman Mark Rosenker spoke about how the NTSB improves safety through its transparent, objective and comprehensive approach to accident investigations.

Speaking at a gathering in Herndon, VA, Rosenker noted that all documents and records that become part of an NTSB investigation are available to the public. "We believe open access to information provides full transparency and a more complete understanding of the investigation process," Rosenker said. "In this manner we maintain the credibility of the investigation and make a significant contribution to aviation safety in every corner of the world."

Rosenker reminded the group that the Safety Board approaches every accident with a rigorous commitment to objectivity. Referring to the October 2006 accident in which baseball player Cory Lidle's airplane crashed into a high-rise apartment building in Manhattan, Rosenker said, "We didn't let the high profile nature of the accident obscure the facts." On May 1, the NTSB determined that the probable cause of that accident was "the pilot's inadequate planning, judgment and airmanship in the performance of a 180-degree turn maneuver inside of a limited turning space."

In addressing the NTSB's comprehensive approach, Rosenker cited the ongoing investigation of the Lexington, KY Comair accident in August 2006, which 49 people were killed. "We are examining all possible areas including airport markings, construction issues, the notice to airman system, air traffic control procedures, crew resource management, personnel fatigue, and new technologies in the cockpit." The investigation is expected to take at least a year to complete.

40th Anniversary Celebration Finale

Chairman Rosenker Throws Out The First Pitch At The Nationals Game...And They Won!



Special Thanks To The Planning Committee For All Of Their Hard Work!